



### **Chris Danou's Capitol Report**

#### **It's Time to Bring Non-Partisan Redistricting to Wisconsin State Government**

There are many issues being discussed at the local, county, state and federal levels in large part due to the upcoming elections. One topic that is being brought up more and more due to the overly partisan nature of current politics is non-partisan redistricting.

Every ten years in response to the updated census counts, legislative district maps are redrawn by the party in control of the Wisconsin State Legislature, thus giving that party an edge for the next ten years. The 2010 election cycle brought a wave that gave Republicans complete control of Wisconsin State Government by winning the Governor's office, as well as majorities in both houses of the State Legislature. That means Republicans had complete control of redrawing Assembly and Senate legislative districts, and as a result, they drew the districts in their favor to provide an advantage for Republicans during elections.

It's my firm belief that voters should choose who represents them and lawmakers shouldn't choose who they represent by drawing safe legislative districts. Since legislative districts were drawn by Republicans to favor Republicans, districts were drawn that are either very Democratic or very Republican to help them keep the majority and legislative control. In the spirit of good government, districts should be as competitive as possible, because then the discussion focuses on the issues and candidate merit versus who is the most Democratic or Republican of everyone running in a partisan primary.

The practice of drawing districts to control legislative boundaries in a blatant effort to favor one party over the other is more commonly known as gerrymandering. This term is now commonly used in our American political vocabulary and it was first used more than two hundred years ago in 1812 in a Boston newspaper.

The word "gerrymander" was created in reaction to the redrawing of Massachusetts State Senate districts under Governor Elbridge Gerry after he signed a bill that redistricted Massachusetts to benefit his own party. When mapped, one of the contorted districts in the Boston area was said to resemble the shape of a salamander. As a result of combining the Governor's last name and the word salamander, gerrymander is a resulting portmanteau of the two words to describe manipulation of the boundaries to favor one party. The gerrymandered redistricting was a notable success then and its activity we've seen both political parties engage in at some point or another since.

One way to stop gerrymandering and make sure legislative districts are drawn fairly and competitively is to have a non-partisan commission draw the maps. This is a practice that has been done in Iowa since 1981 and has experienced great success. It's considered to be a national model other states can look to for guidance and implementation because it has non-elected representatives draw the legislative districts instead of politicians looking out for party interest and control.

Under the Iowa model, the public benefits from having competitive elections because it makes sure candidates appeal to a wide range of voters and listen to the voices of all their constituents, not just the party base or leaders. Non-partisan redistricting will take the politics out of this important part of the democratic process and it will make Wisconsin State Government less partisan by encouraging lawmakers to talk about issues that appeal to and impact a broader range of the electorate. This will also help lawmakers work in a bipartisan way that encourages and promotes good public policy.

Please be sure to vote Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> when Wisconsin will be on the national stage as voters cast their ballot in the Republican and Democratic Presidential primaries. There are also local races and what should be a very close State Supreme Court race on the ballot that day as well. Early voting ends this Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup> and polls are open from 7:00am – 8:00pm on Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>. A recent law change requires a photo ID so please remember to bring that with you.

